

Transcription – Materiality – Signature. Dancing and Writing between Resistance and Excess

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Dance and *Schrift*¹, i.e. writing, are engaged in a dynamic relationship – and have been so in various respects over a long historical period of time. How can we explore these dynamics, this love-hate relationship? In current dance discourse, opposing as well as connecting positions have been, so it seems, clearly adopted in theory and practice. To exemplify these positions, I would like to quote two statements from the field of dance practice: in response to a question on the relationship of dance and *Schrift*, choreographer Thomas Lehmen stated that they are “completely different domains. Dancing and *Schrift* are simply not the same. There is no linguistic equivalent to what is being danced. There is no such thing.” (Klementz/Cramer 2004: 21) Curator Heike Albrecht represents the opposite point of view – a commitment to the communicability of language/*Schrift* and dance:

“Nevertheless, I still see the process of reading dance through language as decisive. The act of repetition, of recognition is also one of reflection, the reflection of one’s own position [...]. A cognitive process is set in motion and this is where the articulation of ideas through dance and language come face to face.” (Id.)

1 Translator’s note: The German terms *Schrift* and *Schreiben* both translate as writing in English. *Schrift* stands for the material side of writing, i.e. text (typeface, font, script, etc.). We have chosen to retain the German term in italics throughout the text to differentiate it from *Schreiben*, which is the actual physical act of writing.

The following paper seeks to explore the relationship of dance and *Schrift* in a way that examines their differences and conjunctions beyond the usual well-known oppositions – the oppositions of orality/corporeality and texuality, presence and absence, performativity and semiotics, ephemerality and traces.

This requires ignoring a large part of the relationship between dance and *Schrift* – a field, which is, after all, widely discussed in the area of cultural studies. In the case of *Schrift*, I am first of all referring to the broad range of discourses covering the history and presentation of dance and choreography and which are, in fact, inseparable from their creation: discourses, such as those expressed in concept papers, written project applications, program notes, reviews as well as essays and historical analyses. In addition, I will also ignore the highly varied ‘forms of dance notation’ with their intricate intertwining of *Schrift* and movement and their historic transformations. And finally, this is also not the place to examine ‘dance’ and ‘*Schrift* as cultural techniques’, although this is also an important aspect.²

Instead, I would like to concentrate on a perspective that focuses on the performativity – of dance, as well as *Schrift*. Instead of speaking of dance and *Schrift* in a ‘general’ sense, I would like to approach it from the perspective of movement and its corporeality – and examine both forms of expression, dancing and writing, as movement phenomena. So, instead of speaking of dance and *Schrift* – i.e. writing as text, it will be dancing/choreographing and *Schreiben*³ – i.e. writing as a physical act. This will bring to our attention other similarities and disparities.

In philosophy – especially in phenomenologically accentuated philosophy – the issues of dancing-writing are examined primarily from the body’s point of view. Jean-Luc Nancy, for example, approaches the subject of “writing the body” (cf. Nancy 2008) from the perspective of the gesture of addressing. Writing here means “not the monstration, the demonstration of a signification, but a

- 2 On dance as a cultural technique (the theory of Marcel Mauss) cf. Inge Baxmann: *The Body as Archive. On the Difficult Relationship between Movement and History* (2007); as representative of the extensive literature on *Schrift* cf. Gernot Grubbe/Werner Kogge/Sybille Krämer (eds.): *Schrift. Kulturtechnik zwischen Auge, Hand und Maschine* (2005). On the debate between *Schrift* and performance cf. e.g. Walter Wiethölter/Hans Georg Pott/Alfred Messerli (eds.): *Stimme und Schrift. Zur Geschichte und Systematik sekundärer Oralität* (2008), as well as Davide Giuriato/Stephan Kammer (eds.): *Bilder der Handschrift. Die graphische Dimension der Literatur* (2006).
- 3 See footnote 1.

gesture toward touching upon sense” (id. 2008: 17). The ‘body’ is thus always already in itself different:

“Hence the impossibility of writing *to* or of writing *the* body without ruptures, reversals, discontinuities (discreteness) or trivialities, contradictions and displacements of discourse within itself.” (Id. 2008: 19)

But finally, it is precisely here – in this contingent ‘body writing’ – where resistance, the excess of the corporeal becomes apparent: “the ongoing protest of bodies in-against-writing” (id. 2008: 21).

Even writing itself, as a physical act of movement, should be included in this approach. Roland Barthes has pointed out that this aspect of writing has largely been neglected in the theory of poststructuralism: the sensual, physical act that writing can be (aside from the semiotic production of meaningful signs): “[...] *scription, the moving, the muscular act of writing*” (Barthes 2002: 983-984).

In the following, I would like to examine these intersections and differences of ‘dancing-writing’ and their performative manifestations from three perspectives: 1. transcriptions and transmissions; 2. materiality; and 3. signature.

A literary episode from literature on understanding dancing and writing will provide insight into the fundamental difference between these processes.

The author Robert Walser has discovered a unique form of writing in his ‘micrograms’. He permits himself to ‘digress’ in his *Räuber* novel in order to keep the quill moving, as he calls it. He comments on this as follows: “Maybe this is one of the secrets of better authorship, i.e. there simply has to be something impulsive entering the writing.” (Kammer 2008: 195)⁴ Walser’s poetological reflections repeatedly revolve around the execution and limitations of writing. He observes and comments the scribbling, the sweep of the pen and the application of the pencil. It is about the performance of writing, the complexity of this ‘action’ as a movement of the body as a graphic act. In an essay on Robert Walser, Walter Benjamin reflects precisely on this aspect of performative writing: “To write and to never correct what has been written is the ultimate penetration of unintentionality and greatest intent.” (Benjamin 1977: 325) For the act of writing, this type of performance is highly unusual: to write – for example when creating a poetic text – almost always means moving forward and back again. As a production of text, writing doesn’t take place in a single, dynamic movement. Instead, writing is ‘roughened’ by interruption, deletion, erasure,

4 I am grateful to an excellent essay by Stephan Kammer for pointing out this passage in the text.

overwriting – by those processes of stratified graphé, which, for example, editors are confronted with in the archeology of text generation.

Conversely, this is precisely the distinguishing feature of the performance of dance when presented – namely moving in a single motion, without interruption, without re-vision or correction. If writing reveals itself as performative in the act of putting something (down) *into* writing, then dance does the same during live performance. The difference in ‘showing oneself’ in each action is characteristic: in its self-recursivity and its self-interruptions, writing already brings its own transformation, modification, re-scription into the performative act. In dance as performance, the reverse is usually the case: the act is unique, irreversible, and cannot be retrieved again nor later corrected. William Forsythe sums up this quality of dance in the words:

“The choreographic idea traditionally materializes in a chain of bodily action with the moments of its performance being the first, last and only instances of a particular interpretation.” (Forsythe 2008: 6)

We have here a substantiation of ideas in movement that “cannot be repeated in the totality of its dimensions by any other means” (id.).

This difference between the singularity of performing dance and the self-interruption in performing writing coincides with another aspect of dancing/writing and performativity. It is the aspect of showing and showing-oneself in the act of movement. In the act of performance, dance shows (manifests itself) and shows itself (points to itself). In contrast, writing as movement – and this has as yet been little reflected upon as an aspect of the performativity of writing (Kammer 2008: 201ff) – eludes observation by an audience. The physical co-presence of actor/performer and observer, constitutive to the presentation of dance, is only of conditional relevance for the act of writing. Instead, the unobserved nature of this act is characteristic for writing. Writing, unless it is done in experimental situations, is a performance that doesn’t present itself and is not subjugated to the regime of observation through an audience. All the more complex, however, are the scenes of self-observation in the performance of writing – and here writing and dancing see eye to eye. The ‘showing-itself’ and ‘reading-itself’ in the act of writing is a staggered process: by reading what I have written, I see the ‘have-written’, I see myself as writer. I observe myself in the act of writing-reading. A dancer does not read himself or herself, i.e. the traces of what his or her movement in space has ‘written’. Nevertheless, in a temporal dimension that reaches backwards and forwards in time, the multiplicity of self-perception is comparable.

Elizabeth Waterhouse, a Forsythe Company dancer, formulates this self-perception in the following way:

“I have learned to spread my awareness throughout my body [...] to maintain a large proprioceptive awareness that extends from fingertips to toes. I have learned to multitask my concentration into observing/feedback and anticipating/feedforward. [...] Dancing [...] is a skilful activity that binds analyzing and acting.” (Waterhouse 2010: 153-181)

This side of an elaborated self-perception in the act of dancing, writing – in a complex temporal structure of remembering and “intuiting” (cf. Walter Benjamin) – seems to me an aspect of performing writing and dancing that deserves further discussion.

TRANSCRIPTIONS AND TRANSMISSIONS BETWEEN DANCE AND SCRIPT

One possibility for examining the relationship between dance and *Schrift* is the aspect of transmission/transcription. Of course, direct translation between dancing and writing isn’t possible. Nevertheless, transmissions of a kind do take place – in various discourse scenarios: from dance into texts about dance and choreography, reviews, descriptions, scientific analyses. And, *vice versa*, from writing – from myths, stories, linguistic imagery or theoretical texts – *into* choreography and dance. It is this process in which the ambivalences, attractions and repulsions between dance and text occur – an ongoing process that creates friction. How should we imagine transmissions between disparate elements? And how should we proceed to act upon them? We are thus constantly confronted with the *topos* of ‘untranslatability’. Merce Cunningham, for example, repeatedly emphasized the ‘untranslatability’ not only of dance, but also of music and other arts.⁵

This emphasizes a side of intransigence, which describes a peculiar quality of the art form of dance – a ‘presentation of difference’ and action that occurs nowhere else in a similar fashion. In Thomas Lehmen’s words: ‘In working with dance, I (already) see a space in which things can be said in a different manner than with language’ (Klementz/Cramer 2004: 21) – a statement, which *mutatis*

5 Susan Foster made a critical reference to this debate on ‘untranslatability’ in her reflections on methodological problems, while however still assuming that the integrity of dance allows for transmission into other media (cf. Foster 1986: 187).

mutandis also applies to other art forms. In the theory of translation – from Charles Peirce, Roman Jacobson, Walter Benjamin to Umberto Eco – there is an almost irresolvable argument about if and how something is lost or whether something is gained – a surplus of sense and sensuality – in the process of transmission or transcription (from one language to another, from one art form to another). In his – broad – concept of translation, Roman Jacobson refers to the work of semiotician Charles Peirce and praises his theory for stating that in “translation, the element that is to be interpreted is always enriched in a creative way” (Eco 2006: 271). In other words, there is an excess of alternatives of meaning and comprehension in such a process. The shifts, detours as well as the gaps and permanent obstacles in what is to be transmitted open up a creative dimension. Disfigurement and similarity are in a state of friction – and it is precisely here that the potential of a third element, *between* dance and *Schrift*, could reveal itself: a similarity without an original. This is why Walter Benjamin speaks of “translatability” and not of (a complete) translation (cf. Benjamin 1972)⁶. Given such reflections on the openness of and the shifts in the translation process, the question ‘where is the primary and where the secondary?’ seems obsolete. In the process of translation, the intransigency of an artwork becomes apparent – its untranslatability into language or other media. When dancers and choreographers insist on this chasm between dance and *Schrift* (of translation), they highlight a crucial aspect of the aesthetic experience. They point out the openness of meaning in choreographic work – as does William Forsythe, when he emphasizes the resistance of a choreographic performance to objectifying, unequivocal interpretation: the space-time experience, as succinct as it may be, is ephemeral and evades examination “from the position that language offers the sciences and other branches of arts, that leave up synchronic artifacts for detailed inspection” (Forsythe 2008: 7). Once again, the familiar topos of ephemerality, which makes an act of dance inaccessible and resistant, is invoked to resist the fixation/transcription into *Schrift*. At the same time, there has always been an exchange between *Schrift* and dance, between body and language – especially in the choreographies/performances of William Forsythe. Thomas Lehmen himself points this out when establishing that language and *Schrift* represent media for the conceptualization and interpretation/reading of dance movements on the one hand, but on the other, also constitute elements of the choreographic process:

6 On Benjamin’s theory of translation: cf. Jacques Derrida: *Babylonische Türme. Wege, Umwege, Abwege* (1997) and *Theologie der Übersetzung* (1997) as well as Paul de Man: *Schlussfolgerungen: Walter Benjamins ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers’* (1997).

“In a ballet by William Forsythe,” Lehmen says, “it’s about graphic elements, about letters, so to say [...] about words that appear again and again. But they have no assigned meanings. They enter a space in which we can’t and shouldn’t say what a specific element concretely means, although they are articulated in a super clear way. That is simply the space of art.” (Klementz/Cramer 2004: 21)

In his *Schreibstück*, Thomas Lehmen himself started an experiment in the space between writing/*Schrift* and choreography. What does it mean to base a choreography on a book, to start from a piece of writing? This implies that the idea already includes a process of transcription. “The idea was,” Thomas Lehmen says, “to write a ‘dance piece as a book’. Choreographers, dancers and producers were supposed to communicate about the idea and with one another in order to perform the piece.” (id. 2004: 20) In a series of performances, three choreographers each showed their version, i.e.: their implementation of the ‘plans’ outlined in the text and the attached ‘boxes’. The transcriptions – into body movement, into dance – are implemented on the basis of an act of writing; they are staggered in time like a musical canon and visible in the same space: as realizations of the infinite possible number of transcriptions in the “simultaneity of corporeal reality” (cf. Lehmen 2002: n.p.)⁷. Each implementation of *Schreibstück* and its respective choreographic re-writing simultaneously refers to what is not being implemented. In the process of transcription and showing the transmitted, it becomes transparent how choreographers work: in the juxtaposition, we behold the processes of decision-making, freedom and reduction contained in the creative process. And what becomes clear is that there is no original version that an author (in the traditional sense of the term) could be responsible for. It is evident that the dynamic relationship of text and body, of writing and dancing is situated in the open field of translatability: as a never-ending process of transcriptivity. Ludwig Jäger applies the concept of transcriptivity from a linguistic perspective and relates it to basal processes of transcriptive adaptation in language: speech (its performance) as an ‘ante-script’ of the scriptural. – A reflection/the application of this theoretical model for the relationship of dance/choreography and *Schrift* seems self-evident (cf. Jäger 2002).

7 On Thomas Lehmen’s *Schreibstück* cf. Pirkko Husemann: *Choreographie als kritische Praxis. Arbeitsweisen bei Xavier Le Roy und Thomas Lehmen* (2009).

MATERIALITY: RESISTANT WRITING/DANCING

Apart from Roland Barthes' books on the theory of writing, the theory of *Schrift* has only recently turned its attention to the intrinsic value of the materiality of *Schrift* and writing: its visual and haptic materiality, the concreteness, dynamics and corporeal nature of writing (cf. Greber/Ehlich/Müller 2002). To describe the relationship of this physical act (in contrast to *Schrift* as documentation), Jean-Luc Nancy uses a term derived from Roland Barthes' concept of "dysgraphia": "exscription".

"There is only exscription through writing, but what's exscribed remains this other edge that inscription, though signifying on an edge obstinately continues to indicate as its own-other edge. Thus, for every writing, a body is own-other edge [...]." (Nancy 2008: 87)

According to Nancy, writing/reading is not primarily a visual act of deciphering, but rather "touching and being touched": "writing, reading, a matter of tact" (id.). The materiality of writing is, thus, fundamentally linked to the experience of resistance. Not only do the 'figures' of movement – writing/dancing – describe the complex structure of the space-time matrix. Their materiality⁸ reveals itself instead in the 'flow' of the movement, which makes the exertion directed at the resistant material tangible. Roland Barthes mentioned that the line and the flow of inscription testifies to a power, to work – an 'energon' that appears as a gesture of exhaustion. "The line is a visible action." (Barthes 1991: 170) Is the other side of resistance contained in this act, even if it is not perceivable on the surface? Not just the materiality of the carrier of inscription, but also that of the body, in the resistance of practice, rejection and omission of movement?

The resistance of writing and dancing does not however only mean the friction of the materiality of movement, but also the aesthetic and political dimension of a movement *out* of resistance: writing-dancing as resistance! Contemporary artists from various cultures stage the inscribing motion of the body as a gesture of protest, as an act of resistance against political violence. William Forsythe did so in his choreography *Human Writes* (2005), as did Taysir Batnij in his *Photographic Fragments* (2001) in which he wrote on the walls and entranceways of houses in Gaza: he painted graffiti and scratched names, numbers and drawings into the walls as a protest against the violation of human

8 On the subject – concerning cultural techniques of communication – cf. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht/K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (eds.): *Materialität der Kommunikation* (1988).

dignity.⁹ These are gestures that write against the denigration and expropriation of human rights. William Forsythe's choreographic installation *Human Writes* attempts to make the denied corporeal traces of a resistant writing visible as movement (cf. Brandstetter 2008). The project follows a trail that – beyond any perfection of writing/dancing – leads to a victims' perspective on this power of writing. It travels to the very edge of writing, the underground areas and cracks in the movements demarcate the other side of good and beautiful writing, of good and beautiful dancing: "dysgraphia" (Barthes 1991: 173).

Forsythe's *Human Writes* deals with writing as action:

"Writing is always also movement. I consider my choreographic practice to be spatial writing. The dancers' movements should leave traces. In *Human Writes* they have to be good in order to deal with hindrances as best they can to be able to at least reproduce a few letters." (Forsythe 2006: n.p.)

However, the act of reproduction becomes an act of "exscription", of "dysgraphia". The performance is about re-writing individual sentences from the *Declaration of Human Rights*. Dancers and non-dancers/audience members move around desks, 'writing tables'. The rule governing the writing action is that 'no line or letter' is to be created directly. Writing "must be accompanied by a physical limitation, a resistance" (id.). Thus every gesture, every learned movement is broken down and beset with hindrances. Smooth, unobstructed writing – the mastery of movement and thus the performance of writing – is distorted and disfigured. These limiting acts, which the audience participates in as co-writers, are so far from any school of familiar writing/dancing that they become an extreme challenge to movement coordination. Thus these resistances permit something to become visible and tangible in every move, which is hidden in the official text of the *Declaration of Human Rights*: the violence *in the Schrift* of the statute. Paradoxically, we are dealing here with a text that postulates the physical and political 'integrity' of the individual body over the power of the state and judiciary. The constitutive paradox that "humanity is still filled with inhumanity" (id.) here becomes evident in the process of writing – even *where* politics acts in the name of *Human Rights*. The white sheets of paper, painstakingly written on, preserve the traces of writing. They are witness to this protest against a disposability of the body, which is defined by politics, economics and the media.

9 See the exhibition *TASWIR – Islamische Bildwelten und Moderne* in the Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin 2009, as well as Gabriele Brandstetter: *Forsythes Human Writes: Vom widerständigen Schreiben* (2009).

SIGNATURE: WRITING/DANCING AS AN ACT OF SIGNING

Finally, I would like to turn to a specific aspect of writing that is related to dancing: the signature. Is there such a thing as signing dance, signing *as* dancing? What could it consist of? In the unique, non-reproducible movement of a dancer? Then *every* dance would be a signing – inseparable from the individual act of movement. Or is the subsequent *trace* of a movement its signature? This presumes that movement is reproducible and transferable – a figuration of dance that refers to the absence of the body. Is the character of a signature the recognizable handwriting of a dancer, a choreographer – in terms of “style” (Foster 1986: 76ff)? What would such an identity consist of? And who or which ‘reader’-witness would attest to such a signature?

Who signs (for) dance? And how does dance (counter)sign?

Signing – in terms of signing one’s name – is a special act of writing. It refers to (coming from *signatura* = official seal, signature) an artifact, a legal text, a creation or object provided by a sign, name or artist’s mark (cf. Macho 2005). Signature is closely tied to the history of authority and authorship, to ratification and authentication. This relationship between authorship and signature is equally important for dance – though far more complicated than in the fields of law, politics and art. I don’t want to review here the historically and theoretically difficult issues of dance, ‘authorship’ and the concept of artistic oeuvre, which are closely linked to the meaning of ‘signature’ (cf. Brandstetter 2010). This relationship – especially the subject of ‘authorship’ – is often also the topic of conceptual reflection in many dance pieces by contemporary performers.¹⁰

The defining aspect of these pieces is an approach to choreography/dance that is not focused on a ‘product’, but rather on triggering a process of experience. Signature in dance thus does not consist of fixing and preserving an intention behind the movement. Instead it opens up a space for an encounter with the audience in which the choreographic *Schrift* delineates a “neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing” (cf. Barthes 1977). Tino Sehgal’s work, for example, of which there is no written or visual documentation of any kind, is a radical experiment on the question of whether and how signing can still occur if all discourse about a performance and its documentation is

10 The post-structural discourse on authorship – Roland Barthes’ *La Mort de l'auteur* (1968) and Michel Foucault’s *Qu'est-ce qu'un Auteur?* (1969) – form the matrix of performances by numerous contemporary dancers and choreographers, among them Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy, deufert&plischke.

circumvented. Wherein lies the production, the ‘signing’, of the performative ‘sculpture’ in Sehgal’s concept installations? Does the viewer – in this co-production – become a co-author of the performance’s re-signing? Is it the museum visitors, who assume the act of signing as soon as they enter the museum space that a Sehgal sculpture fills (cf. von Hantelmann 2007)?

The dynamic relationship between author-performer and choreographer-dancer has been dissolved in various concepts underlying postmodern and contemporary productions. This includes the process of removing hierarchies, in which more and more collective forms of production seem to circumvent the rules of (author) representation and the economic rules of commercial exploitation. If these processes of cooperative production as contained in different forms of collective ‘working methods’ (as Pirkko Husemann has shown) today characterize choreographing-performing: wherein then lies the signing? Choreographers such as Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy and Thomas Lehmen represent a *different* form of (counter)signing *in* dance: for example, the form of ‘negotiating’ decisions and actions as in Xavier Le Roy’s *Projekt* (2003) (Husemann 2009: 140ff).

In connection with issues surrounding the relationship between signing and authorship in dance (which has only been touched upon here), I would finally like to examine the subject of signature from another perspective: can dancing(-writing) be regarded as choreographic signing via the body? Sketching the performance with the ‘body-stylo’ (to modify a term used in film for the ‘auteur’-camera)? Signature and signing are characterized by an irresolvable ambivalence: a signature attests to the signer’s identity and the originality of this act of writing; at the same time, it also signifies the absence of the signer. We could thus ask in Jacques Derrida’s words: “Does the absolute singularity of an event of the signature ever occur? Are there signatures?” (Derrida 1971: 17) In order to function, “a signature must have a reproducible, iterable, imitable form” (id.). A signature can only be read as a *seal*, *if* repeatable. Bearing this in mind, can dance be signed? For on the one hand, the movement of writing-dancing is unique and cannot be repeated; on the other, its (*Schrift*/signature) motion comes from a repetition, a re-citation. In his thoughts on the “choreographic act” (Forsythe 2008: 6), William Forsythe emphasizes the “irretrievability of choreographic enactment” (id. 2008: 7). All the same, ‘repetition’ does take place – albeit as ongoing displacement; in this sense, signing would be repetition as a re-citation of the unrepeatable. If we regard ‘signing’ in dance *not* as a sign of authorship (not as the signet of a product), then we can look at another facet of signing as writing/dancing: signing as poetic practice. This practice is realized with significant differences in different media. Benoît Lachambre’s performance

Is you me //// Par B.Leux (2008) is characterized by ‘inscription’ as a process of incessant signing. In the piece, video artist Laurent Goldring’s simultaneous graffiti and Benoît Lachambre’s movement actions are inscribed into the performance space, laid out as a ‘white cube’, as a permanent superimposition.¹¹ For the audience, the flatness of the quick drawings and their projection on the rear wall of the stage are translated into the physicality of the dancer, who, in a state of permanent transformation, merges with the graphics like a manga or comic book animation. A prominent characteristic of this ‘graphing’ are the acts of deleting, overwriting and (colorfully) superimposing the writing-motions. Processes, which apply to the processing of computer fonts as well as the editing of text, namely the central operations of ‘substitute’ and ‘delete’, are here presented and named as part of the proceedings.¹² Yet: who is responsible for these processes? Who is signing? Who applies the blood-red welt-lines to the performer’s bare back? It is like an alien signature critically examining the ethical dimension of ‘inscription’ in light of its endless virtual manipulability.

By comparison, dancing and inscription can enter into complex poetic and media relationships in other ways, the dynamics of which produce a game of excess – a transformative, kinaesthetic experience that transcends dancing and writing. Trisha Brown thus describes her drawings as “dancing on the paper” (Brown/Teicher 1998: 25). Her “dancegrams” appear neither as documentary nor as prescriptive notations, but rather as a medium that describes the surroundings (“they sculpt space”, id. 1998: 15). The drawings open up an in-between space; they are like a “word”, “that sits in the air between me and the dancers” (id. 1998: 21). Dancing and writing: both are processes that do *not* represent. In an interview with Hendel Teicher, Trisha Brown remarks that before she began drawing, she used language to describe dances and movement. But her type of choreographic thinking led her to begin drawing, because, as she adds, “my personal language of movement was polydirectional” (id. 1998: 13). Here, dance-writing becomes visual poetry, which – in the style of its markings, the rhythm of its lines and their orientation – is itself choreographically conceived. “For instance, the pyramid on graph paper was a dance for three people, and I wanted them to be able to understand the notion of accumulating and de-accumulating.” (Id. 1998: 14)

11 Because of illness, the performances in Berlin (Tanz im August) on August 17/18, 2009, took place without the second performer, Louise Lecavalier.

12 This vocabulary is repeatedly used in the ‘rap’ text of the audio installation.

Illustration 1: Trisha Brown: Untitled, 1975.

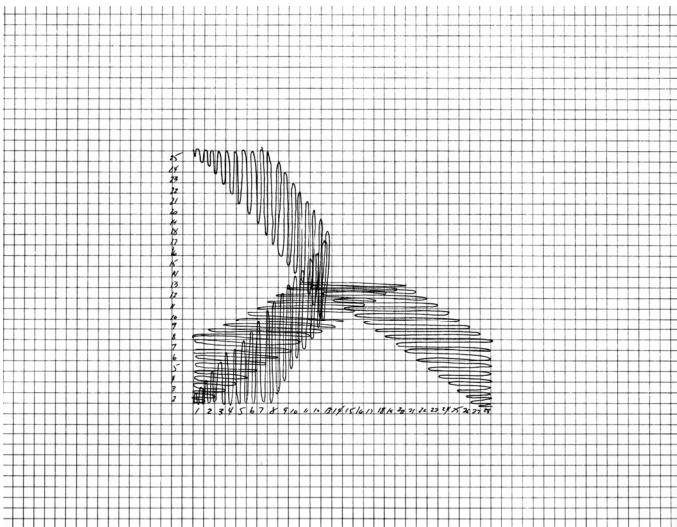


Photo: D. James Dee

Illustration 2: Trisha Brown: Untitled, 1975.

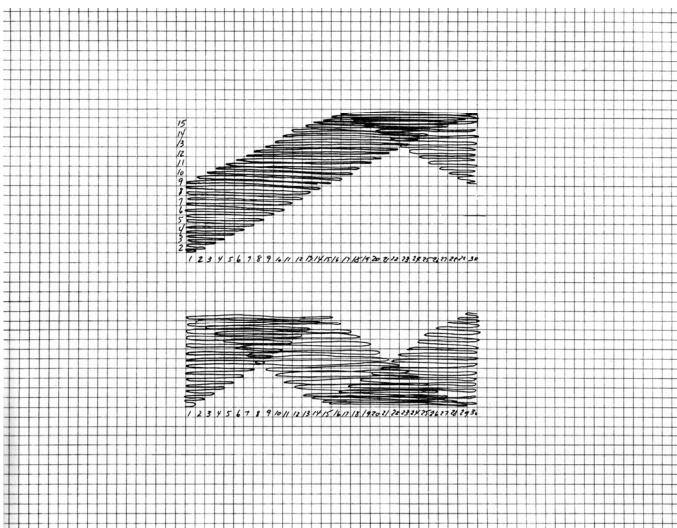


Photo: D. James Dee

Dance (de)scription as ‘graph’ thus gains analytical potential for the choreography of spatial relationships. Drawing lines on paper is simultaneously also

a strategy of designing and a laboratory of ideas in search of movements that are surprising (also to oneself). This is, so Trisha Brown, “a quietly explosive moment”. “A drawing? I don’t know where it comes from and I can’t control it and that’s thrilling, so that’s the pleasure. The rare simultaneity of intention, action, result, timing.” (id. 1998: 32) “Drawing” thus becomes a method of exploration, with which to investigate the limitations of the body and of movement.

Another example is Amos Hetz’s choreography, *I am drawing you are dancing. You are drawing I am dancing* (Tel Aviv, 2007).¹³ The performance oscillates between two fields of drawing: the ‘graph’ of writing – a piece with large, dynamic brushstrokes – and the physical movements of dancing. The dancer/illustrator alternates between both fields of writing-signing. For both movement scenarios – for the brushstroke and the physical action – the style, the dynamics of the movement impulse, the positioning and release of the gesture are significant. Amos Hetz explains his choreography:

“Two actions of the moving body: the first isolated to the hand and arm. The other following with the whole body. [...] This meandering between action and waiting, between the gesture, drawing the disappearing image, still haunts me.” (Brandstetter 2010: 53)

It could be that this drawing, in perceiving the gap between the hand and body, between writing and dancing, is no signing in the sense of authorship. It is not about (counter)signing/naming a piece. What is revealed here is the trace which precedes the act of signing as a gesture: a *paraphieren*, (to place one’s initials)¹⁴, in the sense of a provisional (counter)signing. To *paraphe*, to furnish with an idiosyncratic name, stands for a provisional signature; an act that does not yet imply the form of a (legally) binding text/signature. It is a form of writing-dancing in which the border between body and binding signature is open: a movement by the *Schrift* as well as the dance, which unfolds even *before* the code. On this wavering line of indeterminacy, signing(-dancing) is a poetic game in which – to quote Amos Hetz – “images from the unknown emerge onto the page

13 In the first version, the piece was performed as a dialogue between Amos Hetz and dancer Yael Cnaani. In a second version (that I am referring to here), Amos Hetz showed the piece as a solo (Berlin 2007, Academy of the Arts).

14 Translator’s Note: The German term *paraphe* is descended from the Greek *παραγράφειν* and stands for name stamps or shorthand symbols as often used in the signing of several page long contracts, so that individual pages cannot later be replaced unknown. While also used for name stamps or shorthand symbols, the English term *initial* lacks this legal implication.

and into the core of dancing“ (Brandstetter 2010: 53). It is a space in which writing and dancing do not exclude one another, but instead meet in a dynamic encounter.

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